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SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON FN MUTINY IN SEGUELA

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¶11. (C) Summary. DCM, ECON Chief and Political Specialist met with senior Forces Nouvelles military leaders during a recent visit to Bouake and Seguela, flashpoint of recent FN violence. Emboffs had unusually frank meetings with FAFN Chief of Staff Bakayoko and Deputy Chief of Staff Wattao, underscoring the seriousness with which the FN took the uprising. Wattao was widely praised by local officials with whom Emboffs met for restoring order to Seguela and ending the abusive, rapacious ways of Kone's men during his control over the region. End Summary.

¶12. (C) During a July 15-18 trip to Bouake and Seguela, Emboffs met with FN senior military officers and political directors to discuss the recent uprising in Seguela. FAFN leaders granted open meetings, reflecting the seriousness with which they took the mutiny and their determination to demonstrate to key international interlocutors that they now have a firm grip on the situation. Both cities were calm. The United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) political director in Bouake reported that while the FN military wing (FAFN) is suffering "low morale" (as evidenced by recent insurrections in Bouake over late demobilization payments), Bouake ComZone Cherif Ousmane's men have a firm grip on the city. In Seguela, FAFN soldiers from Cherif Ousmane's Bouake units had clear control over the region, but held a low profile within the city limits. Commerce and daily activity appeared normal in the immediate aftermath of President Gbagbo's July 14 trip to the region.

¶13. (C) In a meeting with FN Deputy Political Director Cisse Sindou, DCM asked Sindou about Gbagbo's trip and specifically whether the timing played out Gbagbo's alleged objective of making it appear that only he could bring control and order to Seguela. Sindou was direct in responding that Gbagbo could not have traveled to Seguela without the FN guaranteeing his security. This was the first time in eight years that he had been able to do so. He was also quite clear in explaining that Gbagbo did not meet with any of the rank and file FAFN during his visit - only the civilian population and senior FN leaders. He stressed that the uprising in Seguela was a military matter and was therefore handled in military channels. Sindou said as signatories to the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA) the FN was obligated to provide security for the President of Cote d'Ivoire.

¶14. (C) Sindou also said that he had spent the previous two weeks in Seguela, working with senior military officers to bring an end to the mutiny and preparing for the President's July 14 visit. Sindou said the FN allowed an April demonstration in Bouake by disgruntled FAFN troops, due to their "understandable" discontent over failure to receive their demobilization benefits, but during a second uprising in Bouake, the FN were forced to respond firmly in order to maintain discipline within the ranks. As a result of the

FAFN's new approach to discipline, its troops in Bouake are no longer allowed to carry automatic weapons (Note: Emboffs saw FAFN troops in Bouake directing traffic and ensuring security without their customary AKs and sporting new uniforms. End note).

¶ 15. (C) FAFN Chief of Staff Bakayoko identified controversy over demobilization benefits ("prime" in French) and indiscipline within former Seguela ComZone Zakaria Kone's troops as key elements in the events of June 28-30. Bakayoko stressed that failure to pay the "prime" is a dangerous gamble by the state, implicitly criticizing national level spending priorities. Bakayoko said he personally went to Seguela and the nearby Kani regroupment site to oversee FAFN efforts to quell the mutiny, and that the FAFN also sent Deputy Chief of Staff Wattao to oversee the region's security. Wattao told Emboffs he will remain in the Seguela area "until the whole thing is over," again underscoring the importance of the region and the need to maintain control over the various factions within the FN.

¶ 16. (C) Bakayoko told Emboffs that Prime Minister Soro dismissed former ComZone Zakaria Kone because Kone had expressed open distrust of President Gbagbo and the OPA and had told his men the President would order an attack. Wattao went further than Bakayoko, asserting that Kone personally manipulated his former comrades by lying and saying Wattao was planning to kill and torture them. UNOCI political and military officials in Seguela underscored the common refrain that Kone was "uninterested in DDR" and that he was unusually corrupt. Bakayoko told Emboffs that during the brief clash on June 28 and 29, Soro gave the FAFN a

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single imperative: to limit bloodshed if at all possible. Following that order, reliable FAFN forces from ComZone Cherif Ousmane Bouake unit, under the direct command of Deputy Chief of Staff Wattao, are encamped outside of Seguela while Wattao and other senior leaders try to persuade the mutineers to disperse and demobilize.

¶ 17. (C) During a meeting with Emboffs in Seguela, Wattao said he was working closely with the Integrated Command Center (CCI) to bring the situation to closure. He introduced Emboffs to an assistant from the CCI who was acting as a close political advisor on the matter (Note: it was not clear if the advisor was FANCI or an FN-affiliated officer informally seconded to CCI, since he wore a uniform with a CCI arm patch). Wattao said only 85 soldiers were involved in the uprising, although local UNOCI military sources put that figure higher, between 120 and 320. Wattao said the situation is "80 percent" back to normal, and that political parties are returning to the region and conducting pre-election activities.

¶ 18. (C) UNOCI officials in Seguela said they were very involved in calming the situation of June 28-29, and that their mediation was crucial. UNOCI asked for the city to be considered neutral, effectively separating the combatants after June 28. UNOCI also asked Wattao to delay coming to the front lines on the 29th, defusing tensions. UNOCI says the situation in Seguela remains "tense" and that genuine progress on DDR and regroupment is essential to lock in recent gains in stability. Speaking in general terms, UNOCI representatives said FAFN organization and discipline worsen by the day, with FAFN soldiers engaged in unchecked criminality in surrounding villages, although they credited Wattao for beginning to bring this situation under control. One UNOCI military officer expressed surprise that after 6 years, the FAFN had no semblance of military structures.

¶ 19. (SBU) Emboffs went to Kani to witness first-hand the process of FAFN regroupment in Seguela. Wattao addressed some 150-200 candidates for reintegration into the FANCI, some of whom were presumably participants in the uprising. Wattao stressed the need for discipline, and said a future in

the unified armed forces was an excellent opportunity for advancement that each man needs to take seriously. Wattao said he himself would be "resigning" sometime before the presidential elections, but did not elaborate.

¶10. (SBU) Representatives from each of the three main political parties in Seguela indicated varying levels of satisfaction with Wattao's takeover of the region, particularly his reduction of Zakaria Kone's previously exorbitant transit taxes of CFA 5000 (USD 12) per vehicle to a more reasonable CFA 1000 (USD 2.50). Overall, all of the parties expressed some level of impatience with the FN and were eager to see a unified national administration return to full control.

¶11. (C) Comment. The FN and FAFN leadership continues to take the Seguela mutiny very seriously, as evidenced by FAFN Deputy Chief of Staff Wattao's indefinite assignment to the region. FAFN senior commanders blame Zakaria Kone explicitly for provoking the uprising, indicating he will not be allowed to return to FN territory anytime soon. Apart from the intra-FAFN factionalism over how to handle President Gbagbo's political overtures and tensions created by the inability to pay demobilization benefits (septels), control over the Seguela region's diamond resources appears to have been a factor motivating the conflict (septel). For the moment, the situation appears under control. End

Comment.

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